The Skrobonak Family of Fairbury

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Adam Skrobonak (1888-1976) was a well-known farmer in the northeast corner of Avoca Township for many years. One of his daughters was Mildred Skrobonak. She was well-known in the Fairbury area and is remembered for the 1954 pick-up truck she used to drive around Fairbury in the 1970s.

The story of the Skrobonak family began with Adam Skrobonak's birth in what is now Poland. Adam noted on his wedding license that Jacob Skrobonak and Katherine Ciprunska were his parents.

Poland has a very long history of being known by many different names. In 1888, when Adam Skrobonak was born, Poland was split into three areas associated with Russia, Prussia, and Austria. In 1918, Poland returned to being a designated separate country. In later years, Adam Skrobonak reported on U.S. Census reports that he was born in Poland, Russia. This area was in the eastern part of modern-day Poland.

Adam Skrobonak reported on the 1920 U.S. Census that he emigrated from Poland to Livingston County in 1905 when he was 17. It is very unusual for someone to emigrate from Poland to Livingston County. In the 1878 Livingston County history book, only one other person from Poland had emigrated to Livingston County.

Adam Skrobonak worked as a farm laborer and began working for Henry Immke Jr. (1882-1956) in 1909 when Adam was 21 years of age. In that era, Mr. Immke owned land in the northeast corner of Avoca Township.

In 1917, Adam Skrobonak filled out his World War I draft registration card. He reported that he was a laborer on the farm of Henry Immke Jr. in Fairbury and supported his mother and sister in Germany. The draft card official noted on Adam's registration that he had not provided any support to his mother and sister in Germany after World War I started.

Also, in 1917, Adam Skrobonak married Kathryn A. Branz. When they married in Livingston County, Adam was 28, and Kathryn was 25. Adam and Kathryn Skrobonak had three children.

Kathryn Branz's parents were Ernest J. Branz Sr. (1870-1951) and Minnie C. Schulz (1872-1945). Henry Immke Jr.'s wife was Anna E. Branz (1890-1951). Anna's mother's maiden name was Elizabeth Schulz (1867-1946). Adam Skrobonak's wife was a first cousin of the wife of Henry Immke Jr.

Adam and Kathryn Skrobonak's first child was born in 1919. They named their son Ernest William Skrobonak. Ernest Skrobonak never married.

In the 1920 Census, the Adam Skrobonak family lived in Avoca Township. Adam, who was 32, was a general farming laborer. He rented his house and lived with his wife Kathryn and son Ernest Skrobonak. One year after the Census, daughter Mildred Minnie Skrobonak was born in Avoca Township. Mildred also never married.

In 1928, Evelyn Mae Skrobonak, the third child of Adam and Kathryn Skrobonak, was born in Avoca Township. In 1949, Evelyn married Everett Charles Ruff (1916-1998). Mr. Ruff was 33, and Evelyn was 19 when they married. Everett and Evelyn Ruff had four children and lived in McDowell.

In the 1930 Census, Adam reported being a farmer in Avoca Township. Members of the household were Adam, 39, Katherine, 38, Ernest, 11, Mildred, 9, and Evelyn, 1. The 1936 Daily Leader reported that Mildred Skrobonak had passed the County Test which enabled her to graduate from the 8th grade. Mildred did not continue her schooling after the eighth grade.

In October of 1940, Ernest Skrobonak filled out his World War II draft registration card. Ernest reported that he worked for his father, Adam Skrobonak. A 1942 newspaper article reported that Ernest had been drafted and went to Peoria with other Livingston County men to take their physical exams. No record could be found of Ernest Skrobonak serving in World War II.

When the 1940 Census was completed, Adam Skrobonak was still farming in Avoca Township. Adam reported that second grade was the highest level of schooling he had completed. Ernest reported he had completed the seventh grade, and Mildred reported she had finished the eighth grade.

In the 1940s, many Livingston County farmers grew oats to use as feed for their horses. Some farmers would band together and form a cooperative group called a "threshing run." In 1941, the Pantagraph ran an article about the oldest group of this type in Livingston County called the Banner Threshing Run. This group had been in existence for 45 years and was established in 1896. The members of this group included Adam Skrobonak, Fred Immke, William Attig, Frank Pritchard, Adam Skrobonak, Ed Miller, Henry Immke, Charles Friesleben, LeRoy Tronc, Alvia Immke, Harry Vitzhum, Chris Jensen, John Miller, Carl Schauble Sr., and Carl Schauble Jr.

Tenant Adam Skrobonak farmed in Section 12 of Avoca Township and rented a house on land owned by Chris Glinnen. The house was within one mile of the Vermilion River and had a long driveway to the nearest road to the north.

The 1943 Pantagraph published a story about the land tenant farmed by Adam Skrobonak being flooded three times in the same year. Their livestock was removed to a nearby

farm. The Adam Skrobonak family was able to leave and go to town by having four horses pull a wagon down their long lane.

In the 1950 Census, Adam still farmed in Avoca Township. He was 59, and his wife Kathryn was 57. Ernest Skrobonak, age 30, and Mildred Skrobonak, age 28, still lived at home with their parents.

In 1951, Ernest Skrobonak started working as a maintenance employee at the Fairbury Fairgrounds. He continued working there until he died in 1971 when he was only 52. Mildred Skrobonak and her sister Evelyn Ruff also worked there.

In May of 1964, a crew of nine people planted 220,000 tomato plants on Jim Goold's 40-acre patch northwest of Fairbury. They put 5,500 tomato plants per acre 16 inches apart and in rows 66 inches wide. Jim rented a unique planter to do the job. The helpers on the tomato planting crew were Lois Chapman, Karen Lake, Tom Hudson, Mary Bagley, Margaret Karr, Mildred Skrobonak, Evelyn Ruff, and Everett Ruff. Jack Taylor and Goold acted as tractor operators. The tomato crop was later harvested by 50 Mexican-Americans who lived on the Goold farm for 8 weeks.

Around 1966, the Adam Skrobonak family moved to a farm southwest of Fairbury near Indian Creek. According to a 1969 Pantagraph article, Mildred Skrobonak suffered a severe fracture of her right leg when a rock was thrown from a lawn mower she was operating. Mildred would have been 48 years old when this accident happened.

After her brother Ernest Skrobonak died in 1971, Mildred inherited his truck and drove it around Fairbury, including getting groceries at Dave's Supermarket. The truck was about a 1954 Chevrolet or GMC green pick-up with E. Skrobonak stenciled on the door. Mildred actually wore out the truck, and the K&S Fairbury dealership found her a used car to replace it.

Kathryn Skrobonak died in 1976 at the age of 84. Her husband, Adam Skrobonak, died 13 days later at the age of 87. They were buried in Fairbury's Graceland Cemetery.

Dale Dameron (1927-2017) was a Fairbury plumber for many years. After a recent heavy ice storm, Mildred Skrobonak called him and said her house had no heat. Dale Dameron went to the farmhouse and found the furnace in the basement. He checked and found the chimney had no draw or draft required to run a furnace. Dale Dameron then went outdoors and looked up to see the chimney was completely blocked with ice, and the shingles were covered with ice. Dale Dameron explained the problem to Mildred and said he could only safely send any of his workers to fix the chimney once the ice melted.

Mildred then told Dale Dameron that she could solve the problem with the iced-up chimney. She went into the house and came out with her shotgun. Mildred shot the top of the chimney until the ice was cleared. Dale Dameron then got the furnace running, and the heat was restored to the house.

Mildred Skrobonak died in 2008 at Fairview Haven at the age of 86. She was buried in Graceland Cemetery. Her sister, Evelyn Ruff, died in 2018 at the age of 90.

The Skrobonak family was well-known for many decades in Avoca Township and Fairbury because of their many years of work at the Fairbury Fairgrounds. Everyone who met Mildred has their own unique story to tell about her because she was a very interesting woman.

Mildred Skrobonak always enjoyed gardening and she entered vegetables in many different Fairbury Fairs. This Pontiac Daily Leader photo was taken in 1988 and she was very proud of her large tomatoes she had grown that year in her garden.

Mildred Skrobonak
Long-Time Fairbury Fair Worker
1921-2008